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F.B.I. Will Seek Aide Who Cited News Deception

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 3 — The White House has asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation to find the source of a news report that the Administration organized an elaborate "disinformation" campaign that misled American reporters, Administration officials said today.

The officials said the request was made to a special team of F.B.I. agents after publication of the report Thursday in The Washington Post.

A senior White House official said today that the F.B.I. had also been asked to locate the source of a story in The Wall Street Journal in August that was purportedly generated by the disinformation plan.

Credibility Is 'Hurt'

The White House official said the disclosures this week had "hurt" the Administration's credibility with news organizations and had also damaged the credibility of top Reagan aides.

But he made it clear that the White House intended to follow through with its plan to use the F.B.I. to try to locate Government employees who give sensitive information to reporters.

Other Administration officials said the investigations would be carried out by a new F.B.I. team made up of experienced agents.

The White House official denied that the White House had released any information with the intention to mislead the press. He said the F.B.I. would be asked to determine the intent of those who provided information to The Journal for its article.

The Journal's article, which said the United States and Libya were on a "collision course," set off a spate of similar accounts indicating that new evidence showed the Libyan leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, was again active in supporting terrorism.

According to The Post's account, the Administration devised a policy that included leaking false information intended to convince Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi that the United States was about to attack Libya or that he would be overthrown from within.

As President Reagan left for the retreat at Camp David, Md., this afternoon, he told reporters that the United States had not lied about Colonel Qaddafi and Libya. "We didn't tell any lies, and we weren't doing any of these disinformation things that we've been cited with doing," he said.

Concern in Congress

Despite his statements, members of Congress expressed concern that White House officials might have embarked on a campaign to intentionally mislead American news about Libya.

Senator William S. Cohen, Republican of Maine, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he grew worried last summer while reading news reports indicating that Colonel Qaddafi had become increasingly unstable and was facing internal political threats.

"That did not seem consistent with other information I was looking at," Senator Cohen said. "I can only conclude that the reports were without foundation or someone was deliberately seeking to plant such information."

Representative Matthew F. McHugh, a Democrat of New York who sits on the House Intelligence Committee, said, "To the extent that the Administration may have deliberately misled the American press, it is a dangerous strategy that would undermine the credibility of the Government across the board."

The Intelligence Committees in both the Senate and House have announced that they would begin inquiries into the disclosures in The Washington Post.

Senate Aide Sees No Campaign

Bernard F. McMahon, the staff director of the Senate committee, said committee staff members conducted interviews on Thursday and were convinced the Administration had not organized a "disinformation" campaign designed to mislead American reporters about Libya.

"Did they deliberately lie about what they knew in order to achieve an objective?" he said. "I think the answer to that is no."

Michael J. O'Neil, chief counsel of the House Intelligence Committee, said the panel planned to study whether the Central Intelligence Agency had a role in the purported disinformation effort aimed at Libya.

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